



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Bureau of Rural Sciences

Salinity Inquiry
Supplementary
Submission No. 72.2

Mr Jerome Brown
Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Science and Innovation
R1 Suite 16
Parliament House
Canberra 2600

Dear Mr Brown,

House of Representatives

**Standing Committee on Science and Innovation
Coordination of Science to combat the nation's
salinity problem**

You will recall that the Bureau of Rural Sciences (BRS), with officers of the Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries and the Department of Environment and Heritage provided a submission to and attended a Committee hearing on 7 November 2003.

We are aware that others have also provided submissions to and attended Committee hearings, including one on 12 November when representatives of the Cooperative research Centre for Landscape Evolution and Mineral Exploration (CRC) attended a Committee hearing, and another by the Chief Scientist, in company with others, on 24 November. In both these hearings, reference is made to the BRS which require correction and clarification as follows:

In the Hansard draft record of the **12 November pages from S&I 15 through to S&I 26**, there is reference on various pages by Mr Wilkes of the CRC in relation to the BRS. I wish to refute several of these statements and clarify others as the record as stated in the draft Hansard is not correct.

Specifically, in relation to **page 15, paragraph 3**, Mr Wilkes comments about the concept of "ultrasounding the earth" and taking "five simple steps" to tackling salinity. The former of these concepts has been used by the BRS for ease of communication of a complex scientific technology and, as you are aware, in respect of the latter comment, the BRS has published a pamphlet describing five steps to tackling salinity, and this was made available to the Committee as part of the BRS submission. BRS has never suggested that the issue of salinity management is simple, but there are times and places for using language in certain constructs to convey messages.

On page 24, **paragraph 1**, Mr Wilkes is further quoted as saying that the BRS "had the rug pulled from under them" in respect of changes to the national funding approach to the NAP. This is gross simplification of circumstances that were very complex. More significantly Mr Wilkes goes on to say that in August 2002 the BRS said "that they would have to compete against us (the CRC) because of their need to bring in money from outside". BRS has been a semi-commercial enterprise for some considerable time and this situation is no different from that which had existed previously

in respect of the technical capacity to undertake salinity mapping work being spread among several organisation, including the BRS, the CRC, CSIRO and a number of State agencies. BRS has never made the claim that they have to compete with the CRC to bring in external funds, it is just a fact of life that we are one of the payers in the national salinity mapping capability.

Further in **paragraph 3** Mr Wilkes goes on to say that the BRS is "forced, even though they are a Commonwealth agency, to find money externally to keep their operation going". This situation is no different from that of several other Commonwealth agencies that are members of the CRC, namely Geosciences Australia, CSIRO and the tertiary education sector, and is common to many government organisations in many sectors.

Turning to the Hansard of **24 November, pages S&I 17 & 18, and particularly page 17 paragraph 7** there is reference by the Chair to a criticism of BRS that "they are not making it (airborne survey results) all that freely available, because they are involved in a semi-commercial capacity. BRS wishes to correct the perception that it has not made (public) information freely available. In two cases BRS has undertaken airborne geophysical research under contract to other parties. In these cases, these data were not within the purview of the BRS to release until authorized to do so. In all cases where the BRS is the owner of data, and it should be noted that the BRS does considerable work for commercial bodies such as Agricultural Research and Development Corporations as a contractor and is hence not the owner of the resulting data, it complies with the provisions of the Australian Government's data release requirements.

I trust that this clarifies a number of perceptions that appear to have received some prominence in respect of BRS through the course of the Committee's hearings and I would be grateful if you could draw these comments to the attention of Committee members. If I can be of any further assistance, I may be contacted on 02 6272 3937.

Yours sincerely



Dr Colin Grant
Deputy Chief Executive

7 January 2004

